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FOR NEA A/S WELCH FROM AMBASSADOR RICCIARDONE

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SUBJECT: ADVANCING THE FREEDOM AGENDA IN EGYPT

REF: A. STATE 88465

[1](#)B. CAIRO 153

[1](#)1. Embassy Cairo continues forceful advocacy of the President's Freedom Agenda. Per paras 11, 14, and 15 of ref A, it is standard Embassy Cairo practice, led by the Ambassador, to meet with democracy and human rights activists, oppositionists, and dissidents; to engage in public speaking opportunities and media outreach to promote democratic ideals and reform; and to use the full range of programmatic and diplomatic tools of our many mission agencies and sections to advance the Freedom Agenda. MEPI and USAID's Democracy and Governance programs constitute critical components of our mission's efforts. Our USAID-backed multi-disciplinary programming is detailed in separate democracy strategy papers that have been in circulation between Embassy Cairo and Washington for the past year.

[1](#)2. We look forward to receiving information from NEA/FO regarding the status of the Forum for the Future (ref A, para 16).

[1](#)3. We have built the promotion of democracy into our internal mission management processes. Each week, the Ambassador reviews democracy promotion and the Freedom Agenda with the country team. Each fortnight, the DCM chairs the Institutions of Democracy Working Group (IDWG), which coordinates democracy policy and programs among USAID and the Embassy's Public Affairs and Economic-Political (ECPO) sections. USAID also produces and disseminates to concerned USG addressees (via e-mail) a monthly summary of democracy program activities. (USG readers not currently receiving this e-mail who wish to do so should contact (babrams@usaid.gov)). At their orientation sessions with the Ambassador soon after their arrivals, new American members of the mission receive wallet cards to constantly remind them of our mission statement: "We strengthen our partnership to secure peace, to build democracy, and to expand prosperity, to serve the American and Egyptian people."

[1](#)4. Besides our work with civil society (examples below), our official engagement with the GOE, spanning various agencies and sectors, is a vital element of our strategy to promote democracy. In particular, the Ambassador regularly raises both broad policy concerns and specific democracy and human rights cases with Egyptian leaders, including the President, the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister, the Interior Minister and other top security officials, the Justice Minister, the Public Prosecutor, senior judges, and legislators.

[1](#)5. Following are a few examples of our current and recent efforts to support and promote the Freedom Agenda:

- The Ambassador's July 4 remarks, delivered to a reception attended by an estimated 4,000 key Egyptian contacts, cited President Bush's upholding of liberty and democracy as "the cornerstone of our foreign policy." Per our standard practice, we invited a full range of leading dissident and oppositionist contacts, in full view of the media, state security, and our more mainstream establishment contacts. Attendees at the event included opposition Al Ghad Party president Ehab Al Khoully, the president and other leaders of the Al Wasat Party (an as yet unregistered opposition party), leaders of the newly registered National Democratic Front party, several parliamentarians, and numerous human rights and civil society leaders and MEPI program participants.

- Over the past several months, the public affairs section has organized numerous media events focusing on the U.S. commitment to promoting democratic reform in Egypt. Among these was the February 26 appearance of the Ambassador on a popular Egyptian call-in satellite talk show. During the 90-minute program, conducted entirely in Arabic, the Ambassador reaffirmed U.S. support for expanding rights in the realm of free expression, better governance, transparent election procedures, support for the release of the prisoner Ayman Nour, and the protection of the rights of religious minorities. Other Embassy officers have also conducted interviews with the local media, including a June 22 live satellite TV show on which our PAO debated an anti-American opposition parliamentarian, and rebutted allegations of "unwarranted interference" by the USG in Egyptian politics. These two events alone reached millions of Egyptians.

- The Ambassador hosted a July 11 roundtable of leading Egyptian print and broadcast commentators, which included a lively discussion of U.S. democracy promotion, and religious

CAIRO 00002206 002 OF 003

freedom issues. The Ambassador regularly holds such roundtables with leading journalists and editors-in-chief of major Egyptian publications, including oppositionist critics, in an effort to reach out to opinion shapers.

- The Ambassador will conduct the next in a series of webchats on July 18 on "Egypt-U.S. Bilateral Relations," through which we hope to continue to expand our engagement with a wide audience of web-savvy young Egyptians.

- Embassy officers regularly meet with the range of Egyptian opposition parties, human rights advocates, civil society activists, political analysts, and others to discuss with them U.S. policies and garner their reactions and thoughts on the Egyptian political scene.

- Embassy officers are continuously involved in recruiting for and funding small grants projects through MEPI and our in-house Institutions of Democracy Working Group. Some examples of recent programs including training young lawyers on human rights and democratic principles, training for elections monitors, and anti-corruption grants

- The Ambassador and other Embassy officers regularly meet with leading civil society activists and liberal intellectuals such as Saad Eddin Ibrahim, Osama al Ghazali Harb, Tarek Heggy, Hisham Qassem, Ghada Shabandar, Hala Mustafa, and Bahia Al Din Ibrachy. We also meet leading activist bloggers; Issandr El-Amrani (arabist.net) has twice been a guest in the Ambassador's residence.

- On June 17, the Embassy's Regional English Language Office hosted Debra Lee, author of "American Legal English," and creator of the "Language 4 Law" website. Dr. Lee offered presentations on American legal English to several Cairo human rights NGO's, Egyptian judges, and the law faculty of Mansoura University.

- The Embassy and USAID sponsored a June research visit on Trafficking in Persons (TIP) issues from an expert team from

Chemonics. During the visit, the team, with Embassy assistance, conducted seminars with Egyptian NGO's and journalists interested in combating TIP.

- In May, as part of an effort to promote World Press Freedom Day, Embassy Cairo conducted internet training for 15 journalists from Nahdet Misr, Egypt's first independent newspaper.

- On March 22, the Ambassador again called on Boutros Boutros Ghali, head of the National Council on Human Rights, to discuss a range of human rights issues.

- On March 18 the Ambassador participated in a board meeting and an expanded membership meeting at the Ibn Khaldun Center, a leading Egyptian civil society organization run by Dr. Saad Eddin Ibrahim, on the occasion of the anniversary of the release of Ibrahim from prison. Other Embassy officers occasionally participate in other IKC events.

- On March 14, as part of Embassy Cairo's celebration of Women's History Month, the public affairs section arranged a program for Susan Stroud, executive director of the Washington based "Innovations in Civic Participation." Stroud spoke at an Egyptian NGO to a group of 40 youth from various non-governmental and governmental offices involved in community development.

- On March 7, the Ambassador visited the headquarters of Al Wafd party (Egypt's oldest political party, and current leading opposition party). He met with twenty members of the leadership of the party, discussing U.S. foreign policy, including democracy promotion.

- In April and May, the Ambassador worked with the Speaker of the People's Assembly to arrange the first U.S. Congressional (and U.S. diplomatic) contacts in six years with the full range of Parliamentary membership, including the leader of the largest self-claimed "democratic" opposition bloc, the Muslim Brotherhood "independents."

- As reported in ref B, on January 17 the Ambassador met with Gameela Ismail, the wife of imprisoned Al Ghad Party leader Ayman Nour. Poloff is in close and regular communication with Ismail, and others in the Ghad leadership. Ismail has not yet accepted the Ambassador's oft-repeated standing invitation for another meeting, evidently out of concern that another meeting with the Ambassador could have negative ramifications on the legal efforts to get her husband

CAIRO 00002206 003 OF 003

released on health parole. We consult most closely with Ismail, in particular, on how official USG statements, including by the Ambassador, can best support her legal strategy in support of Ayman Nour's release. An Embassy officer is present at nearly all hearings in Nour's case. This recently drew an explicit objection from the prosecutor, whom the judge promptly over-ruled.

- On January 14-15, the Embassy sponsored the visit to Egypt of renowned author and Harvard University Public Policy Professor Robert Putnam, to discuss with Egyptians the recent Arabic translation (funded by the Embassy) of his book "Making Democracy Work." In Alexandria, Putnam addressed a large audience of academics, students and journalists at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, regarding the role of social capital in promoting and enhancing democracy. In Cairo, Putnam led a roundtable discussion with researchers and journalists at the Al Ahram Center for Strategic and Political Studies, and held a lunch with several leading Egyptian journalists and intellectuals.

- The public affairs section has supported numerous civic education activities, such as NGO headed by a former government education official which trained hundreds of teachers from public schools. We also supported the media

component of "Project Citizen," an extracurricular activity project undertaken by the California-based Center for Civic Education, aimed at fostering leadership and tolerance among school children.

- The Embassy continues to send dozens of journalists and civic activists to the U.S. to experience various facets of American democracy under the International Visitor Program.
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